

## **“Joy in the Midst of Trouble”**

*June 8, 2025*

Philippians 1:3-11

### **I. Introduction**

When Paul wrote his “Letter to the Philippians,” his situation was rather hopeless. He was imprisoned in Rome, facing possible execution. In particular, he was under house arrest ([Acts 28:23, 30](#)), and to prevent any possibility of escape, he was chained to a Roman soldier 24/7 ([Acts 28:16](#)). Because of his confinement, he wasn’t able to go out and preach the Gospel; at the same time, others took advantage of his situation and preached the gospel as [Philippians 1:15-17](#) says, “**out of envy and rivalry...supposing that they could stir up trouble for me.**”

But in spite of all that Paul was going through, including the possibility of imminent death, he was able to write this letter of joy—in fact, various forms of the word *joy* or *rejoice* appear at least 16 times in this short letter. As he wrote in [Philippians 4:4](#), Paul had learned to “**Rejoice in the Lord always.**” Using these opening prayers of thanksgiving and intercession, Paul taught the Philippian believers how to have “Joy in the Midst of Trouble.”

### **II. Joy in the Midst of Trouble**

**A. First, He had the Philippian believers on his mind.** Rather than sitting in a corner having a pity party for himself as he thought about all of his problems and all the worst-case scenarios, Paul’s thoughts went back to the believers in Philippi—“**I remember you**”—and those thoughts brought him joy. He had the Philippian believers on his mind. The believers he had first met in [Acts 16](#).

During his confinement, Paul must have remembered Lydia whom he and Silas had met on that first Sabbath when they went outside the city to the riverside searching for Jewish worshipers. Here they had found a group of women. [Acts 16:14-15](#) says, “**One of those listening was a woman named Lydia. ... The Lord touched her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.**”

He may have remembered the young demon-possessed slave girl in Philippi who earned money for her owners through her fortune-telling. Turn to Acts 16:16-18. Paul could not have forgotten what followed when he and Silas were “severely flogged and thrown into prison” because of the slave girl’s owners’ loss of income and the riot that they caused. Not only did the Lord give Paul and Silas peace and joy despite their chains and sore backs from the beatings, but God also used their imprisonment to bring the jailer and his household to salvation (Acts 16:26-34).

Paul must have remembered that after he left Macedonia, the Philippian church was the only one to help him financially—turn to Philippians 4:15-16. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, records that these same believers “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” as they contributed to the collection Paul made for the needy believers in Jerusalem. Memories of Philippi and the Philippian believers brought joy to Paul’s heart.

Paul then wrote, “I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel.” A better choice or translation for the Greek word “koinonia” than “partnership” or even “participation” is the word “fellowship.” Fellowship means to “have something in common.” The Philippians shared the same Gospel, the same love of God, the same Great Commission. But their partnership went beyond just belief and words, they had partnered with Paul as they supported his ministry at Philippi and, later, to the rest of the world so that he was free to preach the Gospel. They had sent gifts to him and had ministered to his physical needs again and again. This support, this partnership, this fellowship brought Paul joy.

In verse 6, Paul wrote that he was confident that “that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Paul wasn’t only sure of the salvation the Philippian Christians had received when God forgave their sins, he was sure—he was confident—that God would complete what He had started. Through the Holy Spirit, God was perfecting them. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:16, “Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” God has no unfinished works. The God who saves is the God who justifies—He forgives our sins and who sanctifies—He helps us to become more Christlike and who

glorifies—He takes us to heaven. The God who begins is the God who completes. All this Paul had in mind, and it brought him joy.

**B. He had them in his heart.** Paul had the Philippian believers in his mind, and he also had them in his heart. Being filled with God's love, Paul loved all of them. As we sing at the close of many communion services, Christian love is "*the tie that binds.*" Love between Christians is the evidence of salvation; 1 John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." This is God's love directed towards others through each and every Christian—Romans 5:5 says, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:18, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." Paul showed his love for the Philippians by suffering on their behalf. Paul's love wasn't just something he talked about; it was something he practiced. He had gone through many difficult circumstances including his present imprisonment to spread and confirm the Gospel to them and to others. The Philippians had shown their love for Paul by sending Epaphroditus to Paul. Paul returned this love and concern for the Philippians as he sent a recovering Epaphroditus back to them. This mutual love, this sacrificial love, brought joy to Paul.

Paul wanted them to know how much he loved them, so he wrote in verse 8, "I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus." As his actions showed, he loved them with a sacrificial love—the agape love that caused Jesus Christ to come to earth and give His life for us. Paul wrote about this agape love in 1 Corinthians 13—turn to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Although we often use these words in wedding ceremonies, this is the love—agape love—Christians should have one for another. This is the love of God we have inside each one of us. Because of this love, Paul was able to have joy—the first two sections of "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy" (Galatians 5:22).

**C. He had them in his prayers.** Paul found joy in his memories of the saints, the believers, at Philippi and in his love for them and their love for him. He also found joy in remembering them before God in

prayer, he wrote, “I always pray with joy ... and this is my prayer.” Paul had joy in the midst of his trouble because he had the Philippian believers in his prayers.

Instead of praying for himself and his problems, or even for the physical needs of the Philippians, Paul prayed that their love would grow. Love of fellow Christians is a sure indication of saving faith, in [John 13:35](#) Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” The Philippians were already showing love for Paul and for each other and Paul prayed that “your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.” He prayed that their love for one another and for God would continue to grow.

Knowledge is more than learning a bunch of facts or information. Real knowledge causes a change in one’s heart and actions. Writing to believers in Rome, [Romans 15:14](#) says, “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct others.” Biblical love also involves obedience to the Word. Jesus said in [John 14:15](#), “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” When Paul prayed for “depth of insight,” he was praying that the Philippians would have the ability to know the right action in a given situation. In other words, Paul’s request was that they might express their love in ways that show both knowledge of how to obey God’s will generally and, more specially, of how to make moral decisions based on God’s will in daily life.

Paul went on to say, “So that you may be able to discern what is best.” In [1 Thess.5:21-22](#) Paul wrote, “Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” This is “discerning;” it is being able to distinguish the things that differ. Paul wasn’t just praying that they would be able to differentiate between good and evil, but between good and better and between better and best. Excellence is the quality for which he was praying. These excellent things are the truths, attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds that are God’s will for every believer. [Romans 12:2](#) summarizes it this way, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

Paul's prayer was that they "may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ." *Pure*—some versions use the word *sincere*—has two possible meanings in Paul's day. One meaning has to do with being "tested by sunlight." In ancient Rome, fine pottery was relatively thin and fragile and often developed cracks while making it. Dishonest pottery dealers would fill these cracks with wax before glazing and painting them, making worthless pots difficult to distinguish from expensive ones. The only way to avoid being scammed was to hold the pot up to the sun, making the wax-filled cracks obvious. Reputable dealers would stamp their products with the words *sine cera* (without cracks—sincere). The sincere Christian is not afraid to be held up to the light.

A second meaning is that of sifting, as of grain passing through a sieve to remove impurities. It's similar to the winnowing process that removes chaff from the seed. In either case the point is the same: Paul prayed that Philippians believers would have the kind of character that could pass the test—man's test and especially God's test.

By praying that they would be, "blameless until the day of Christ;" Paul was praying that their lives wouldn't cause others to tumble, and that they would be ready when Jesus returns for His children. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God." 1 John 2:28 says, "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming."

Finally, Paul prayed that they would be "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God." The fruit doesn't come by the Christian's efforts but through Jesus Christ and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Too many Christians try to produce results in their own efforts instead of abiding in Christ and allowing Him to produce the fruit. The spiritual fruit that the Lord produces in believers includes winning the unsaved to Christ, in Romans 1:13 Paul said, "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest, i.e., fruits, among you, just as I have had among the other

**Gentiles.”** Spiritual fruit also includes good works and the fruit of the Spirit in [Galatians 5:22-23](#), all of which Paul had in mind in his prayer for the Philippian believers.

### III. Conclusion

In the midst of a discouraging and depressing situation, Paul was able to have joy. This doesn't mean that he walked around laughing to himself like a crazy man. But it does mean that he had a calmness inside, a deep abiding peace inside his heart. [Philippians 1:13](#) says, **“As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains because of Christ.”** Paul had joy and peace because he took his eyes off of himself and his terrible situation and looked to God and others.

This time in prison wasn't Paul's first difficulty. [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#) lists a variety of issues including being flogged, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked, robbed, and going hungry. Later, Paul wrote about a thorn from Satan. [Turn to 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.](#) We, like the Philippians, can learn from Paul and his experiences. When difficult times, when depressing times come and they will come, remember real joy, lasting joy, doesn't depend on outward circumstances. Real joy depends upon the inward condition of the individual. It depends on the proper attitude toward life and God our Father. Like Paul, 1) Think about others and not yourself; 2) Show your love for others through what you do and say; 3) Pray for others. And most of all remember, as Paul will write in [Philippians 4:13](#), **“I can do all things through him who gives me strength.”**

Paul was basically repeating what Jesus told the Pharisees in [Matthew 22:36-40](#). If you want to have deep, lasting joy then: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** And **“‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”** If you want true joy, look to God and others and, contrary to social media, not at yourself.